



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

WORDSWORTH AND ANNETTE

BY HARRY T. BAKER

THE publication for the first time, in Professor Harper's recent biography, of the facts in the case of Wordsworth's *liaison*, in his twenty-second year, with a young French woman throws a vivid light on the asceticism of his poetry and on its neglect of the passion of love. That asceticism, it becomes evident, was not natural; it was studiously cultivated. His previous biographers had agreed that in early youth he was moody and passionate, subject to whims and sudden enthusiasms. He seems to have been as much in sympathy with the spirit of the French Revolution as Byron or Shelley; and he was old enough, at its beginning, to evaluate it as they could not. His revulsion, after the Reign of Terror and the ascendancy of Napoleon, was due not merely to the failure of revolution without but to the traitorous emotions within his own breast. After spending something more than a year in France, he was suddenly recalled, in December, 1792, or January, 1793, by relatives—his parents were dead—who adopted the efficacious plan of stopping his allowance. Undoubtedly they had learned of his entanglement with Annette, daughter of a French Royalist; and, whether Wordsworth intended to marry her or no, he was prevented. For he had at this time neither occupation nor income.

The *Memoirs* by his nephew, the Bishop of Lincoln, published shortly after the poet's death in 1850, explain Wordsworth's state of mind during this momentous period: "He was an orphan, young, inexperienced, impetuous, enthusiastic, with no friendly voice to guide him, in a foreign country, and that country in a state of revolution. . . . The most licentious theories were propounded; all restraints were broken; libertinism was law. He was encompassed with strong temptations." Having gone so far, the Bishop

makes, however, no further revelations. He excuses without telling why excuse was necessary. Oral tradition at Cambridge is said to have handed down the story; but it was apparently known to but few persons, and its authenticity was probably not established. Hence the conspiracy of silence, if one may venture to call it that, which prevailed from 1793 to 1916!

Annette had borne the poet a daughter, Caroline; and in a sonnet of 1802, *It Is a Beauteous Evening, Calm and Free*, she is addressed in the line,

Dear Child! dear Girl! that walkest with me here,

a line previously thought by critics to refer to his sister Dorothy. In view of the passage which follows, clearly descriptive of the mind of a young child (Dorothy was about thirty years old), the absurdity of such a reference is obvious:

If thou appear untouched by solemn thought,
Thy nature is not therefore less divine:
Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year;
And worship'st at the Temple's inner shrine,
God being with thee when we know it not.

This has a pretty close relation to the central thought of the famous ode, *Intimations of Immortality*: that the young child is nearer to Truth, to God, than the man.

Both mother and daughter had been referred to more than once by name, in Dorothy Wordsworth's *Journal*; but they had apparently not excited the curiosity of readers. Wordsworth did not marry until 1802. About three months before the event he and Dorothy went to Calais to meet Annette and Caroline; and it was then that he wrote the sonnet to his daughter—for whom he evidently cherished an affection which makes one curious to learn of her subsequent career. What Annette's attitude to the proposed marriage to Mary Hutchinson was it is impossible to ascertain; but there is probably something significant in Dorothy's remark in her *Journal*, under date of March 22, 1802, seven months before the ceremony: "A rainy day. Wm. very poorly. 2 letters from Sara [Hutchinson] and one from poor Annette." That Wordsworth's conscience was uneasy at this time seems to be proved by his subsequent visit to France. What became of Annette and the daughter Caroline is not recorded; but Mr. Harper mentions that the

mother was later known as Madame Vallon. This is in itself no proof, however, that she ever married. In default of full evidence it is difficult either to attack or to defend Wordsworth. His relatives may have been responsible for the separation in 1792; but Wordsworth's marriage to Mary Hutchinson would seem to leave something to be explained. And Dorothy's "poor Annette," though capable of more than one interpretation, does not cause one to rest wholly satisfied with her brother's course. Mary Hutchinson, it should be added, is said to have been told the truth about Annette.

Wordsworth's detestation of Byron and Byronism, then, may well have had some root in his own Byronic period of youthful unrestraint and random impulse. His lines in the *Ode to Duty*, written in 1805, are profoundly significant:

Me this unchartered freedom tires;
I feel the weight of chance-desires.

Equally significant is his admonition, in the poem *To the Sons of Burns*, written in 1803:

But ne'er to a seductive lay
Let faith be given;
Nor deem that "light that leads astray,
Is light from Heaven."

The quotation in the last two lines is, of course, from one of Burns' own poems. The application to Wordsworth's early passion is as clear as is the attitude which he later seems to have taken to that passion—and to Annette. None of his published poems appears to have been addressed to her; for surely the Lucy group, written in 1799, goes back to an earlier love, and a more spiritual one, in England. If there is autobiographical value in these, she died suddenly, in the very flush of youth and beauty:

And few could know
When Lucy ceased to be;
But she is in her grave, and, oh,
The difference to me!

The poignancy of the poet's grief makes it probable that this poem, *She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways*, and its companion, *A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal*, were recollections of reality.

At some later period Wordsworth planned to write a

love poem, apparently of some length; but he gave it up for a reason which, in the light of the Annette episode, becomes illuminating. "I feared," he said, "that I might write it with a degree of warmth which could hardly have been approved by my principles, and which might have been undesirable for the reader." One of his biographers, Professor Winchester, dryly comments: "Most readers, I judge, will decide that he might have taken that risk with perfect safety." And so they might, but for Mr. Harper's revelations, which make it clear that the poet was right in suspecting himself of possibilities of strong passion. Indeed, there is something very suggestive in another remark by Mr. Winchester: "There was a vein of asceticism in the man; he seemed a little afraid of all ardent passion, however pure." He *was* afraid; and this explains his reticence on the subject of love.

There is one hitherto neglected poem, nevertheless, which now takes on "something of angelic light." It is, strangely enough, the one concerning which Arnold said: "I can read with pleasure and edification *Peter Bell*, and the whole series of *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, and the address to Mr. Wilkinson's spade, and even the *Thanksgiving Ode*;—everything of Wordsworth, I think, except *Vaudracour and Julia*." Professor A. C. Bradley, writing before Mr. Harper's discoveries, says: "The following lines from *Vaudracour and Julia* make one wonder how this could be to Arnold the only poem of Wordsworth's that he could not read with pleasure:

Arabian fiction never filled the world
 With half the wonders that were wrought for him.
 Earth breathed in one great presence of the spring;
 Life turned the meanest of her implements,
 Before his eyes, to price above all gold;
 The house she dwelt in was a sainted shrine;
 Her chamber-window did surpass in glory
 The portals of the dawn; all paradise
 Could, by the simple opening of a door,
 Let itself in upon him:—pathways, walks,
 Swarmed with enchantment, till his spirit sank,
 Surcharged, within him, overblest to move
 Beneath a sun that wakes a weary world
 To its dull round of ordinary cares;
 A man too happy for mortality!

This poem, though not published until 1820—and there is

probably significance in the delay—was written in 1805. There can be little doubt that it is based upon the Annette episode. Indeed, Mr. Harper professes to see in it “an account of the reasons for their separation.” This, however, is probably to consider it too curiously.

The opening lines, which Mr. Bradley does not adduce, show unmistakably that 1792 was the Romeo-and-Juliet period of Wordsworth’s life, a period when “the white wonder of dear Juliet’s hand” seems more important than the revolutions of empires:

O happy time of youthful lovers (thus
My story may begin), O balmy time,
In which a love-knot on a lady’s brow
Is fairer than the fairest star in heaven!

This is not the mild William we knew. His genius has suffered a sea change. There is something almost Shakespearean in the passage which Mr. Bradley quotes. It “gives a very echo to the seat where love is throned.” Let no one say, after reading these two passages, that Wordsworth could not write love poetry. He must have deliberately suppressed his tendency to it. His passion for woman became a passion for nature. But how illuminating is Lowell’s comment, which, though applied to himself, has an even deeper application to Wordsworth:

Nor th’ airth don’t git put out with me,
Thet love her’z though she wuz a woman;
Why, th’ ain’t a bird upon the tree
But half forgives my bein’ human.

The “very ecstasy of love”—whether sane or no—had been diverted into a religious exaltation of nature. There never was nature poetry like Wordsworth’s before. Passion, “like a right gipsy”, had beguiled him to the very heart of loss; but in the mountain solitudes he had found his soul again.

In yet another poem of his maturity, *Surprised by Joy—Impatient As the Wind*, written in 1812 or later and published in 1815, Wordsworth probably refers, as Professor Herford has suggested, to the Lucy of his early years. Written on the death of his daughter Catherine—the poet himself states this in a prefatory note—its concluding lines

are nevertheless a piercing reminiscence of an ideal affection in youth:

That thought's return
Was the worst pang that sorrow ever bore,
Save one, one only, when I stood forlorn,
Knowing my heart's best treasure was no more;
That neither present time, nor years unborn
Could to my sight that heavenly face restore.

The lyric intensity of this is rare in Wordsworth's poetry—whether he is writing on love, on nature, or on humble life. This is indeed, to use his own phrase, "emotion recollected in tranquillity." It is perhaps the last evidence of that subterranean fire which he austere strove to quench. Having once confused passion with love, he ever afterward dreaded the flame.

"From the *Lyrical Ballads*," declared Hazlitt petulantly, "it does not appear that men eat or drink, marry or are given in marriage." And the *Ballads* were published in 1798. In that year the youthful Byron had just entered into his lordship at ten, the jocund candles of the French Revolution had burnt out and there was no "Promethean heat" that could their light relume! Burnt out, too, forever, were the Revolutionary flames in young Mr. Wordsworth's breast. Thereafter he dedicated himself to nature, and to peasantry against the solemn background of hills and sky. Solitude became his favorite word—that solitude from whose bright marge he escaped so often into infinity. But he did not, in the bitterness of his disillusion, cry out with Antony,

I am so lated in the world that I
Have lost my way forever.

And, seldom as he expressed it in his later poetry, he must sometimes have felt that struggle to escape into infinity through love, a struggle which Browning describes so admirably:

I yearn upward, touch you close,
Then stand away. I kiss your cheek,
Catch your soul's warmth,—I pluck the rose
And love it more than tongue can speak—
Then the good minute goes. . . .
Only I discern
Infinite passion, and the pain
Of finite hearts that yearn.

In that delightful essay, *On Going a Journey*, Hazlitt

expresses the life creed of many a young Revolutionist of 1789: "The soul of a journey is liberty, perfect liberty, to think, feel, do, just as one pleases." Byron puts it in equivalent phrase:

I would not change my free thoughts for a throne.

So felt Wordsworth in his Byronic and Hazlittian period; and "bliss was it in that dawn to be alive." But Byron and Hazlitt never achieved self-discipline; they gloried in clinging to that crude Revolutionary ardor. It was Wordsworth who, coming to regard life mainly as a matter of "plain living and high thinking", wrote, in his great period from 1798 to 1808, verses of which one of his greatest critics, Leslie Stephen, says: "Other poetry becomes trifling when we make our passages through the Valley of the Shadow of Death; Wordsworth's alone retains its power." In the midst of a military conflict which dwarfs that of Napoleon, how salutary to remember that verdict now. Wordsworth had gone down into the depths of emotion; he had not succumbed; and he had brought up permanent comfort to mankind. Like Shakespeare and like Browning, he made poetry "the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge." And it was in some measure the spiritual upheaval of his early years that perfected his maturer verses. He who would understand Wordsworth must remember the prophecy of his mother, who was taken from him in his childhood. "The only one of her five children," says the poet himself, "about whose future life she was anxious was William; and he, she said, would be remarkable, either for good or for evil. The cause of this was that I was of a stiff, moody, and violent temper." No placid and unpassionate person could have produced, not merely the Lucy poems and the great passage in *Vaudracour and Julia*, but *Tintern Abbey* and *Intimations of Immortality*. Wordsworth came trailing clouds of glory to his quiet refuge on Rydal Mount.

HARRY T. BAKER.